

## A Study of Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* in the Light of Chandra Talpade Mohanty: A Postcolonial Feminist Theory

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### Abstract

Mohanty is a prominent contemporary postcolonial feminist who demands women's solidarity based on the common context of struggle against the hierarchical powers- colonialism, capitalism, racism and patriarchy. This study seeks to examine traces of colonialism, capitalism, racism and solidarity in Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* according to Mohanty's postcolonial feminist theory.

**Keywords:** Postcolonial feminism, Colonialism, Capitalism, Racism, Solidarity.

### Introduction

Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* narrates the story of a traditional woman, Nnu Ego, who knows her identity and its completion in having many children especially the boy one. Suffering from poverty, she knows herself rich, for she has three sons. It seems to her that she would have, according to Ibuza tradition, a comfortable old age due to her sons' help. Having detailed Nnu Ego's painful life in Lagos, a colonized city, the novel ends with her tragic death alone. Yet, far from being devoted to her children exposing her joys of motherhood, Nnu Ego dies, at the end of the story, a lonely death "with no child to hold her hand and no friend to talk to her. She had never really made many friends, so busy had she been building up her joys as a mother" (Emecheta, 2011, p. 224).

Through depicting the oppression and suffering Nnu Ego experiences in Lagos, Emecheta, indeed, highlights the effects of capital politics and colonial patriarchal regimes in Third World women's marginalization and domination. In this regard, it seems that Emecheta's novel is a practical instance of Mohanty's theoretical ideology.

### Are Women as a Homogeneous Group?

As the story of invisibility and marginalization of women who have no voice, Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, aims at rewriting an integral part of history which has been dismissed. Indeed, Emecheta seeks to speak for Ibuza women being multiply marginalized and oppressed by a colonial and indigenous patriarchal society. Mohanty (2003) stresses that it is necessary for Third World women to speak for themselves, to rewrite their history and to produce knowledge about themselves. She suggests that the important question is: who is speaking for Third World women and from what geographical location they are doing so? (p. 52). Hence, Emecheta, as a Nigerian woman, is the best person to rewrite the story of marginalization and suffering of Nigerian women and her novel is an essential source of knowledge about them.

In the novel, female figures are multiply victimized by oppressive forces of race, gender and class, though one cannot refer to them as a homogeneous group. In Mohanty's argument, Western

feminists in their problematic discussions of Third World women, ignoring the diversity among women, consider all the native women as a homogeneous group. However, women have different identity, history, struggle and everyday lives. In fact, “women are not as a singular monolithic subject. Even when they share the same culture, they are still different”. (Emecheta, 2011, p. 17)

That’s why she asserts that Third World women should rewrite their history based on women’s specific location and struggle and everyday lives. In this regard, Emecheta carefully delineates the diversity among native female figures through their resistance against the patriarchal oppression and domination. Western feminism does not mean “radical feminism based on which men are considered as women’s greatest enemy”(Alaei and Barfi 2014: 15). For instance Ona is a proud woman with a male power. Adaku, a representation of independent women, struggles for her independence and freedom. Nnu Ego, a traditional woman, accepts the superiority of man and she always tries to be a good daughter for her father, a good wife for her husband and a good mother for her children.

Adankwo is the representation of those women who have accepted their fate. Internalizing the patriarchal values and norms, she herself cooperates in the oppression of Nnu Ego and Adaku. Hence, regarding women as a category of analysis or, in other words, as a homogeneous group, as Mohanty (2003) suggests, “results in an assumption of women as an always already constructed group, one that has been labeled powerless, exploited, sexually harassed, and so on” (p. 23).

### **Colonial Policies and Women’s Recolonization**

The *Joy of Motherhood* unfolds events in Nigeria during the period of time that it was invaded and colonized by British imperialism “in 1930 and moving forward to the time of independence from colonial rule” (Killam, 2004, p. 42). Killam (2004) asserts that until late 18 century contact between Europe and Africa was limited to slave trade. But since 1780, a new interest appeared. They sought a market to offer their goods and to develop their religion in Africa. Through developing the theory of social Darwinism, this idea was formed by Europeans that they were superior. Therefore, they were responsible to give Africans identity, civilization, religion and rule. That was the way they justified colonial expansion in Africa. As a result, African formal colonization began from 1885 (p. 48).

Western countries establish themselves as the legitimate rulers of the orient, in other words, they believe that they have the power to build their empire. They are increasingly of the opinion that Third World people are in capable of self-government. Consequently, they have the right both to make rules for them and to control them and to bring about changes in their lives as well (Mohanty, 2003, p. 71). The European invasion and colonization of Africa in the nineteenth century had an enormous impact on Nigerian history because it brought about a series of social, cultural, economic and political changes in Nigeria.

In the novel, Emecheta carefully depicts the way in which the colonial discourse brings about changes such as religious ones in Lagos through the institutions: “the workers are determined to be off only half a day in the week and that is on Sundays in order to attend the church. The marriage should be done in the church, otherwise; it is regarded as an illegal marriage. When Nnu Ego is pregnant for the first time, Nnaif become worry that he may lose his job because they didn’t marry in the church. Moreover, Nnu Ego, in the court, is told to swear by the holy Bible not by her chi”. (Emecheta, 2011, p. 217) Hence, Emecheta highlights how carefully West develops its culture and rules through the institutions.

She, indeed, echoes how women are subject to multiple oppressions by the intersection of oppressive forces of *race*, *gender* and *class*. Emecheta, in this regard, attempts to speak for the disenfranchised African women who are subjugated by the colonial patriarchal society. Due to their

own contradictory sex, race, class and cast positioning, Third World women and women of color are subject to domination and exploitation (Mohanty, 2003, p. 64).

Through disclosing the abusive behaviors with which the colonial patriarchal society has oppressed and silenced the female figures in Lagos, Emecheta criticizes the effects the colonial patriarchal discourse has on the native patriarchy. In this regard, Loomba (2007) mentions: Colonialism intensified patriarchal oppression, often because native men increasingly disenfranchises and excluded from the public sphere, became more tyrannical at home. (p. 64)

Being disempowered and humiliated by British master, Nnaif, as a washer man, “takes out his frustration on Nnu Ego” (Killam, 2004, p. 44). His master calls him “baboon” while laughing and repeating the word. Such a treatment echoes the extent to which West regards the “oriental other” (Morton, 2003, p. 87), as an inferior creature which reflects the stability and fulfillment of them. The British master treats Nnaif in a way that he “is denuded of any cultural or historical being” (p. 86). Here, Emecheta (2011) attempts to question Western humanism: Nnaif didn’t realize that Dr. Meer’s laughter was inspired by that type of wickedness that reduces any man, white or black, intelligent or not, to a new low; lower than the beast of animals, for animals at least respected each other’s feeling, each other’s dignity. (p. 42)

Meanwhile, he reinforces his lost power at home. When Nnaif comes home from Fernando Po in which he worked for white men, he behaves like a lord and master at home. Many a times, he even refuses to answer Nue Ego. Furthermore, being employed at the railway as a grass cutter, Nnaif is happy to reinforce his power at home, something he had lost as the consequence of the colonial domination. Now, he can beat his wife:

One thing was sure: he gained the respect and even the fear of his wife Nue Ego. He could even now offer to beat her up if she went beyond the limits he could stand. He gave her a little house keeping money which bought a bag of garri (*cassava* flour) for the month and some yams; she would have to make up the rest from her trading profits. (p. 117)

Depicting such abusive behaviors Nnu Ego experiences enables Emecheta to criticize the way in which the colonial patriarchal policy intensifies the marginalization and oppression of the disenfranchised Third World women. Women in this colonial society, in fact, suffer from double colonization. As she mentions through her female character, Cordelia, the patriarchal situations women are faced with in such a colonial patriarchal state, in fact, enslave them: “They are all slaves, including us. If their masters treat them badly, they [will] take it out on us”. (p. 51) Hence, Emecheta explores the extent of women’s marginalization and oppression due to their forbidden race and gender in a colonial society.

The colonial patriarchal regime in Lagos, the colonized city which reinforces native patriarchy make women even more silent and oppressed than before. In this way, through outlining different ways of oppression women experience in this society, Emecheta discloses the exploitation and marginalization of women or, in other words, women’s re-colonization in Lagos. In such a colonized city women are subjugated to the colonial patriarchal society. They cannot make a decision for themselves, they don’t have any right to demand for money, to feed their children, and they shouldn’t be educated at all. Even they don’t deserve a meaningful name because they are considered as inferior.

When Nnu Ego gives born to a twin, two baby girls, Nnaif even doesn’t choose their names. Nnu Ego says disappointedly: “they don’t deserve a suitable name” (p. 14). She names one of them Taiwo-she who came first- and the second one Kehinde. Accordingly, Emecheta is depicting a society in which it is gender which determines the value of human being. Female characters are regarded as the subject of double oppression by the intersection of oppressive forces of race, gender and class. They are created just to serve men.

Killam (2004) asserts that Emecheta highlights the way in which the patriarchal discourse values male child more than female one. “Daughters are valuable only in terms of the bride price they may eventually command. Nue Ego sees that money earned from her daughters’ marriages can go toward paying for her sons’ education”. (p. 44) Mohanty (2003) believes, by constructing rules on family, sexuality, home, division of labor, education and so on, colonialist racial, patriarchal relations of rule increase the inequalities in society.

This, by no means, leads Third World women toward understanding “the contradictory sex, race, class, and caste positioning” (p. 64) of themselves in relation to the patriarchal society and so to the emergence of their feminist struggles. Emecheta highlights the fact that having “to live up to the standard set by a male –dominated society” women are not fulfilled creatures (Nyanhongo, 2011, p. 60). They are men’s appendage. The patriarchal hierarchies influence all the dimensions of women’s lives even their identities.

Nnu Ego lives in a society, in which woman’s identity is defined in terms of her relationship with man and her definition as a mother of many children. As Emecheta notices, “gender inequality” in the colonial and indigenous patriarchal society, determines the value of human being: male child is attached excess importance while female child is considered as “other”. We are told that how Adaku is disdained by Nwakusor because she is not the mother of the male child. She was regarded as one without any historical identity when she was told, “you Adaku, the daughter of whoever you are” (Emecheta, 2011, p. 166). So, female’s identity is constructed through her relationship with a patriarchal society. Since “identity has a close-knit relationship with the place [ever one] lives in” (Kohzadi and Azizmohammadi 2014: 656), female’s identity is constructed through her relationship with a patriarchal society.

Hence, women are determined to deny any independent self. What constitutes their identity, self and being is a male dominated society. Nue Ego, in one of her sentimental statements, when she bears to her second set of girl twins, asserts: “God, when will you create a woman –child who would be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody’s appendage?” (p. 186).

As it was mentioned earlier, *The Joys of Motherhood* unfolds events in the period of time that Nigeria was colonized and moves forward to the time of decolonization. By this, Emecheta, indeed, attempts to show how women’s position has changed since the time of independence. Considering Nnaif as a representation of the colonial patriarchal regime and Oshia and Adim as the representations of the post independent generation, it is clear that Emecheta is disclosing how the post independent patriarchal generation is indifferent from the disempowered subaltern women: “the postcolonial state continued the oppression by the colonial regime rather than bring any improvement” (Lionnet, 1995, p. 66).

Mohanty notes that in postcolonial period, the disempowered subaltern group- women in this case – were dismissed by nationalists who still follow hierarchical patriarchy constituted by the colonial government. In Emecheta’s novel, Oshia and Adim, now educated, dismiss her devoted mother, Nnu Ego. They dismiss how their mother is regarded as a bad woman because she worked all the time in order to pay her sons’ educational fees. So the colonial relations of power and rule were replaced by the new relationships, postcolonial patriarchal discourse, which “produce[s] the same results” (qtd. in Killam, 2004, p. 44).

To an extent, Emecheta, in her novel, is speaking for the female characters who have lost their voices by the patriarchal discourses. In doing this, she represents their experiences and oppressions in the native patriarchy which later is reinforced by the racial colonial patriarchal regime. The subaltern Third World women’s oppression and marginalization by the patriarchal relations should not lead us to regard Third World women as the passive victims of the male dominated society. According to Spivak, such a problematic attitude “ignores the social and political

agency of subaltern women” (qtd. in Morton, 2003, p. 64); Furthermore, based on what Mohanty asserts under the title of “women as a category of analysis” (p. 22), it is problematic to assume all Nigerian women as the victims of male violence. She suggests that knowing women as the archetypal victims freezes them into “object-who-defined-themselves”, men into “subjects-who-perpetrate-violence”, and (every) society into “powerless (read: women) and powerful (read: men) groups of people” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 24).

This is, for her, the postcolonial feminist engagement with Western Feminism which regards the subaltern Third World women as the victims of their own patriarchal society regardless of the specific historical and social context. *The Joys of Motherhood* challenges this common assumption in Western feminism that “child birth is unwaged domestic labor” (Morton, 2003, p. 76). In her remarkable analysis of *Breast Giver* by Mahasweta Devi, Spivak questions Western Marxist feminism. Comparing Nue Ego, the marginalized female figure in the *Joys of Motherhood* with Jashoda, the subaltern female character in *Breast Giver*, Spivak’s argument can be invoked, in this regard, too. That aspect of Western Marxist feminism is questioned, by Spivak, which “from the point of view of work, trivializes the theory of value and, from the point of view of mothering as work, ignores the mother as subject” (qtd. in Morton, 2003, p. 76). This is evident in Nnu Ego’s situation as a mother which is exposed in the following passage:

Yes, I have many children, but what do I have to feed them on? On my life, I have to work myself to the bone to look after them I have to give them my all. And if I am lucky enough to die in peace, I even have to give them my soul. They will worship my dead spirit to provide for them: it will be hailed as a good spirit so long as there are plenty of yams and children in the family, but if anything should go wrong, if a young wife doesn’t conceive or there is a famine, my dead spirit will be blamed. When will I be free? (Emecheta, 2011, P: 186-87)

So, Emecheta’s disempowered female protagonist, Nnu Ego, challenges this Western feminist idea of “women as a category of analysis”. It is in this context that Mohanty asserts “the homogeneity of women as a group is mistaken for the historically specific material reality of groups of women” (p. 22). Accordingly, women should not be regarded as “a singular group” (p. 23) based on the shared oppression. Women’s experience and oppression should be theorized in the particular historical and social context. That’s why Third World women’s experience of mothering is different from that of Western women.

### **Capitalist Policies and Women Exploitation**

Mohanty (2003) is on the opinion that the development of capitalism in the industrial countries followed by the racial “sexual politics of global capitalist domination and exploitation” (p. 168) leads to a demand for cheap workers for its goal: more profit, accumulation and exploitation (p. 169). This strategy is central to the development of capitalism. In this regard, the concept of “unskilled” work was a definition of work –for immigrant-which was given by racial capitalism.

In her story, Emecheta questions such capitalist policy which leads to the immigration of many villagers, with no profession, to Lagos- a colonized city- to find job: It was difficult for man with no qualification to find work in the early 1940. In growing numbers they were leaving their village homes to look for jobs in Lagos, and this phenomenon was robbing many areas of their most able-bodied men. (Emecheta, 2011, p. 141)

So, the story seeks to display Mohanty’s suggestion that “disempowered group have been concentrated in jobs with lower pay, less job security, and more difficult working conditions” (Amott & Matthaei 1996; Mohanty, 2003, p. 148). The colonial state knows that if they want to rule a country and have the power over them, they should colonize and control the economic, culture, politics and language of that country. The orient should be dependent on them by every means. They



employed workers with low wage in order to construct differences and hierarchies in society: low class and high class.

Mohanty (2003) declares that the hegemonic colonizer government knows the fact that consolidating their condition as a ruler in the orient is dependent on constructing hierarchies and differences in these countries. So, they construct imaginary boundaries through racial, sexual, class and caste discourses. By constructing such differences, they consolidate their power and rule in the orient. This economic exploitation by the colonial state has an enormous effect on Nigerian's women's lives and experiences. They become more oppressed and exploited by the capital patriarchal society (p. 50).

The novel unfolds the suffering and oppression of Nnu Ego, a woman from traditional Ibuza, who comes to live in Lagos, a colonized city with capitalist economic policies. In Ibuza, a particular sexual division of labor was defined. Men were defined as breadwinner who work in the farm, do hunting, etc., while women "are mere chattels and their principle role is to attend to the needs of their men and to produce children" (Killam, 2004, p. 44). These are the definitions of work for both male and female in this traditional patriarchal society.

Lagos, on the other hands, which undergoes political, economic, social and other changes as the result of the colonial domination, follows the capitalist economic policies. In this situation, a new definition of women's work is offered in order to exploit women. However, this definition is originated in Ibuza patriarchal society. The definition of women's work is originated in oppressive culture of Third World women's native patriarchal society; however, capitalism reproduces and exchanges these local hierarchies (Mohanty, 2003, p. 53). So, Mohanty delineates the relationship between the ideology of gender and work and this is what Emecheta is going to expose in *The Joys of Motherhood*.

In this regard, Mohanty's suggestion can be traced in Emecheta's novel. Invoking the native patriarchal division of labor, capitalism redefines a sexual division of labor. It gives a new definition of women's work. Accordingly, women are offered even more labor. Beside her domestic work, she is expected to do everything in order to feed her children as a good mother. As a result, Nnu Ego, in this colonial society, has to do a "petty business" (Nyanhongo, 2011, p. 88) in order to feed her children and even her husband. She knows, according to the tradition of Ibuza, she is responsible for her children. When she demands her husband more money to feed her children, Nnaif asserts cruelly: "it's your responsibility to feed your children as best you can" (Emecheta, 2011, p. 136), "sell your lappas. You are the chief wife: use your head" (p. 137). Hearing this statement, Nnu Ego perceives that:

She was a prisoner, imprisoned by her love for her children, imprisoned in her role as the senior wife. She was not even expected to demand more money for her family; that was considered below the standard expected of a man in her position. It was not fair, the way men cleverly used a woman's sense of responsibility to actually enslave her. They knew that a traditional wife like herself would never dreams of leaving her children. (p. 137) In this regard, political, economic and social factors work hand-in-hand, determining a woman like Nnu Ego from achieving self-realization and individual empowerment (Nyanhongo, 2011, p. 137).

### **Black Women Solidarity: The Common Context of Struggle**

Mohanty's other important concept, women's solidarity, can be traced in Emecheta's novel, *The Joys of Motherhood*. While considering that African women's lives are colonized and exploited by different factors such as capitalism, colonialism and indigenous patriarchy, Emecheta echoes the sign of African women's solidarity based on "the common interests, historical location, and social identity" (Mohanty, 2003, p. 12).

Mohanty believes that Third World women's solidarity or unity is based on the common context of struggle against power structures and the hierarchical discourses of racism, nationalism, imperialism, capitalism and patriarchy which determine a political oppositional alliance among them. In describing the term "women of color", Mohanty (2003) concludes that "this term designates a political consistency, not a biological or even sociological one" (p. 49). So, for her "unity of action" and "blackness" explore the common context of struggle among people of color and Third World women.

In Emecheta's novel, Ibuza women have the monthly meeting in Lagos which marks the constructed solidarity among them. They help each other in order to both make life easier for themselves and have a life of their own. This statement is documented in the following extract. Whilst Nnu Ego suffers from poverty, other Ibuza women taught her how to start her own business so that she would not have only one outfit to wear.

They let her borrow five shillings from the women's fund and advised her to buy tins of cigarettes and packets of matches (Emecheta, 2011, p. 52). This quotation, moreover, discloses the common context of struggle among black women who are colonized and re-colonized by power structures. This common context of struggle, as depicted, determines their "political oppositional alliance" (Mohanty, 2003, p. 49) and constitutes their commonality. When Nnu Ego and her friend Cordelia quarrel, they soon decide that it was not worth excommunicating each other. There was far more to be gained by communication: "if the tongue and the mouth quarrel, they invariably make it up because they have to stay in the same head" (Emecheta, 2011, p. 63). When the cognition of human beings' limitations becomes a mirror to man's survival and development, [they] will not lose confidence to the uncertain future (Azizmohammadi and Kohzadi 2014: 653).

Indeed, Emecheta, attempts to explore that women of color, however different, acknowledge that solidarity is the only way which constitute their commonality within the power structures: "There was far more to be gained by communication" (p. 63). By description, unity of action and blackness, in *The Joys of Motherhood*, demystify the common context of struggle among women of color in Igbo society. The constructed solidarity, in this regard, unifies them against the power structures, as Mohanty (2003) discusses in her theory. When Nnaife leaves to Ferdinando Po, Nnu Ego, who is pregnant, and her son, Oshia, live in poverty which is reinforced due to the economic pressure. "Oshia [is] lucky if he had a good meal a day". (p. 103)

He is gradually diagnosed to be ill. In this situation, we are told that "everybody gave [Nnu Ego] what they could and the greatest help was that the landlord told her to disregard paying rent for that month" (p. 106). This depiction, indeed, asserts the existence of solidarity not only among women but among all black people. The idea explores the fact that black men and women should struggle against racism side by side. Maybe, this extract justifies Emecheta as a black feminist and a womanist because [...] forerunners of Black Feminism...stimulate black women to love themselves, their race, and their culture and not to trap in white superiority or white beauty standards (Kohzadi et al., 2011: 1307)

### **Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and the Issue of Gender**

Besides criticizing colonialism, capitalism and racism, *The Joys of Motherhood* points out the way in which women are silenced and oppressed by native patriarchy and, however, this oppression is not mediated by race and /or class. This is, by no means, in contrast with postcolonial feminist premise. Because the fundamental issue in the postcolonial feminist discourse is to consider the intersection of *gender*, *class* and *race*. The singular focus on gender and sexuality, as a source of women's oppression, in terms of context, should be dismissed. "Black woman's sexuality is often described in metaphors of speechlessness, space, or vision, as a 'void' or empty space that is

simultaneously ever-visible" (qtd in Collins 2000: 123; Barfi and Alaei 2015: 13). Mohanty (2003) emphasizes that the crucial analytic difference between the white, Western, middle-class feminism and the Third World feminism is the "contrast between a singular focus on gender as a basis for sexual rights and a focus on gender in relation to race and / or class as part of a border liberation struggle" (p. 54).

In this sense, there should be an intersection between gender and race or class in order to be discussed; otherwise, it should be dismissed. Accordingly, gender, race and class are considered as relational terms. Mohanty (2003) also asserts that "to defined feminism purely in gendered terms assumes that our consciousness of being "women" has nothing to do with race, class, nation, or sexuality, just with gender" (p. 55). Accordingly, the postcolonial feminist politics together with black feminism cannot define the feminist principle without regarding this mediation.

Unlike other black feminists who merely struggle to expose African women's racial oppression within the colonial society or the effects of racism on Afro-American women, Emecheta attempts to highlight black women's oppression within the patriarchal Igbo society as well. Besides criticizing racism and the economic, political and cultural effects of colonialism on the disempowered African women's lives, she, in her novels, criticizes the way in which the patriarchal tradition views Igbo women and dominant them. She goes further to give voice to the subaltern African women through her female characters.

Regarding Emecheta's new critical view, Bazin (1985) asserts that "Emecheta's heroin Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood* ventures into feminist consciousness, the awaking of self to the inequities in Igbo cultures, such as son preference, polygamy, rigid sex roles, and a glorification of motherhood, which all render women powerless" (p. 155). It is in this context that Parekh and Jagne (1988) believe that Emecheta is regarded as "feminist rather than womanist" (p. 155). Yet, Emecheta never calls herself a Western feminist. Instead, she calls herself a feminist with a small 'f':

Being a woman, and African born, I see things through an African woman's eyes. I chronicle the title happenings in the lives of the African women I know. I did not know that by doing so I was going to be called a feminist. But if I am now a feminist then I am an African feminist with a small f. (Katrak, 2006, p. 17)

Noting women's suffering and marginalization due to the sexual oppression and gender inequality in Igbo society, Emecheta criticizes the patriarchal violence. In this regard, she discloses Igbo women as the victims of social patriarchy and men as the oppressors. In her novel, *The Joys of Motherhood*, she offers her critique on the native patriarchal domination through exposing the violent oppression and exploitation of the disenfranchised female character. She offers us a depiction of a society, Ibuza, -because Lagos is a colonized city, it is not of primary focus in this debate- in which gender determines who is superior and who is regarded as inferior, who is the norm and who is regarded as the subject.

Ona who lives in Ibuza, a traditional village, takes the position of a male child for her father who has not any boy, with all power and responsibility the first son has. Hence, the traditional patriarchy offers her the male power but it gives her sense of femininity. Just once, when Agbadi was nearly dead she let her steely mask to remove.

Moreover, she is not permitted to have a husband. Her father had remarked that her daughter should never marry. She is, also, not permitted to keep her girl, Nnu Ego. Just after her father's death, she goes to Agbadi's compound to live with him and her girl. And by this, she, indeed, disobeys the traditional patriarchy. Soon, Ona gives birth to a new child but both die. Emecheta, in her discussion on Ona's death, highlights the power of patriarchal regime over female's live and freedom. In her interview, she mentions that: "Ona had to die because she disobeyed tradition by moving to Agbadi's compound" (qtd. in Willey, 2000, p. 6).



The above quotation, indeed, explores the extent to which women's lives are dominated by patriarchal discourse. Ona is sentenced to death because she disobeys the unquestionable patriarchal power. She was free but, indeed, her freedom and life were controlled and dominated by traditional patriarchal discourse. Before her death, she asks Agbadi to let her daughter to be free, to marry every one she wishes, and to be like a woman, something she was not permitted to be.

Moreover, the *Joys of Motherhood* examines the extent to which the female characters are disempowered and disenfranchised by patriarchal relations. The writer "draws attention to some of the basic tenets of this patriarchal Nigerian society, in which women are denied independent lives of their own, existing to serve men" (Nyanhongo, 2011, p. 61). This tendency is apparent in the way Agbadi behaves Ona: wanting Ona powerless and dependent on him, Agbadi, in a sexual affair he has with Ona, an affair which is unexpected and unwanted by her, doesn't give her pleasures as soon as he has his satisfaction: "He worked on her, breaking down all her resistance [...]. He knew he had reduced her to longing and craving for him.

He knew he had won. He wanted her completely humiliated in her burning desire. And Ona knew" (Emecheta, 2011, p. 20). By this description, indeed, Emecheta is going to criticize the patriarchal sexual policies which aim at female dependency and submission by any means. We are told that he knew he is a winner, this statement suggests women never win because they are female, powerless and always dependent on male power.

Emecheta is going to criticize indigenous patriarchal regime which make women internalize their value and superiority through the institutions such as family and tradition, so that; those women accept their inferiority and "otherness". Above all, they themselves, cooperate in making "others" silent and oppressed. Agunwa, Agbadi's senior wife, for instance, calls Ona a "bad woman" because she had power over Agbadi and treated him badly-before their affair- something which is unacceptable and regarded as unforgivable sin in patriarchal society in which women should be subservience and at men's service.

Adaku, who struggles to be independent and makes her own decision, was regarded as an "ambitious woman" by Adankwo, her senior wife and one who represents those women who accept their fate. Adankwo not only accepts the patriarchal hierarchies but also cooperates in oppressing and silencing "the other". Interestingly, she humiliates Adaku for she didn't bear a son for her husband. Meanwhile, she treats her as if she is not a human being. She tells Nnu Ego: Can't you see that you are running from the position your chi has given you leaving it for a woman your husband inherited from his brother, woman whom we here all know to be very ambitious, a woman who has not even born a son for this family. (Emecheta, 2011, p. 158)

The above statement encodes the extent to which the patriarchal society makes women internalize the hierarchies and unquestionable power so much so that women accept male superiority as natural. It should be noted that the word "senior wife" is a title given to the first wife (who has at least a son). This title, carrying with itself a little power, is offered by native patriarchal tradition. Being subjugated to patriarchal force, senior wife, however, is responsible to control and dominate the other wives. As we are told, Adankwo reminds Nnu Ego of her responsibility as senior wife: you should be like a male friend for your husband. You should control his younger wife. She, moreover, tells her: "Have you ever heard of a complete woman without a husband?" (p. 158).

This sentence shows how a woman, in this example Adankwo, internalizes the patriarchal hegemony: is a woman fulfilled without a man? She didn't think so. A woman is always dependent on man for her identity and being. She is not a complete human being without a man. This is the belief the patriarchal discourse develops through institutions in such a society. By giving this title to a woman, the patriarchal society oppresses her more than before. This title carries with itself more

responsibilities and expectations. Indeed, it seems that the woman is enslaved in this title by traditional patriarchy. This is evident in Nnu Ego's case whilst she is unable to complain:

She too was close to tears. She was frightened as well but her culture did not permit her to give in to her fears. She was supposed to be strong, being senior wife, to behave more like a man than a woman. As men were not permitted open grief, she had to learn to hide hers as well. She heard Adaku crying, and she envied her freedom. (p. 140)

As it has already examined, Emecheta attempts to highlight the extent of women's oppression and domination by power relations in the native patriarchy. She questions the power of patriarchal discourse over female's freedom. She depicts a society in which women are regarded as "second class citizen", at the bottom of patriarchal hierarchies.

In some respects, Emecheta criticizes the male authority for treating women as inferior other. However, this view leads us to define female as victim of the male violence- subject of domination- and male as oppressor. This definition of male and female, indeed, suggests that the world is constructed of binary opposition: male (read: superior) and female (read: inferior). However, this is, by no means, in contrast to postcolonial feminist ideology.

Besides this, through disclosing the issue of polygamy in *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta highlights the extent to which women are sexually oppressed. They are deprived of their sexual desire/ rights when they are replaced by a new beautiful young girl. Her depiction of the African women's position in the polygamous family casts further light upon the issue of gender oppression in African feminist study.

Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, highlights the extent to which women and their sexual pleasure are disregarded. We are told that Agbadi neglects his wives for years: "he himself might take wives and then neglect them for years, apart from seeing that they each received their one yam a day; he could bring his mistress to sleep with right in his courtyard while his wives pined and bit their nails for a word from him" (p. 36). This extract, documents the extent of women's sexual oppression and devaluation within the Igbo patriarchal society.

Emecheta, indeed, criticizes the way in which a woman is dehumanized by the male violence. Like a commodity, she can be disregarded after a while. Above all, whilst Agbadi's wives wish to speak with him, he brings his mistress to sleep with and to give her pleasure. This is, indeed, the end of a woman's frustration.

The various depictions in this novel bear this fact out. When Adaku, Nnaif's brother's widow, comes to live with him as his new wife, it is asserted that Nnaif, like a child who is offered a new toy, shows her round the yard. At night, being disregarded, Nnu Ego:

fought back tears as she prepared her own bed for Nnaif and Adaku. It was a good thing she was determined to play the role of the mature senior wife; she was not going to give herself any heartache when the time came for Adaku to sleep on that bed. She must stuff her ears with cloth and make sure she also stuffed her nipple into the mouth of her young son Adim, when they all lay down to sleep. (Emecheta, 2011, pp: 123-24)

In the above statement, Emecheta is going to expose that not only a woman is treated as the "Other" within this polygamous system but she is expected to do according to the standard determined for her: to do as a mature senior wife. Otherwise, she disgraces the name of her family. It is in this context that when Nnu Ego fails to behave like a mature senior wife, and welcome Adaku, we are told that "Nnu Ego was lucky there was no Ibuza man and woman to witness this kind of un-Ibo-like conduct; many people would not have believed it" (p. 120).

Components of the self concept include different features such as physical, psychological, and social which can be influenced by the individual's attitudes, habits, beliefs and ideas (Torkamani et al., 2014: 640). The soul is in danger without revolt. It's essential to revolt to make

and keep a suitable psychic space and inner garden (Alaei et al., 2014: 630). As we have already seen, Emecheta, in *The Joys of Motherhood*, attempts to depict the African women's marginalization, oppression and suffering within the polygamous system. She is going to expose how women are "subject to emotional abuse" (Nyanhongo, 2011, p. 68), their sexual pleasure is dismissed and oppressed by male violence. Even, they are not permitted to say a word of complaint because they are women: the forbidden "Other" and the subject of domination. Hence, how they can question the male authority?!

As it was examined, besides criticizing colonialism, capital economic and racism, Emecheta, in *The Joys of Motherhood*, questions African oppressive patriarchal tradition in which women have been dominated, disempowered and disregarded for a long time. However, the effects of colonialism, capitalism and racism reinforce the undermining and marginalization of women. Emecheta's subsequent novels such as *Double Yoke* (1982), *Destination Biafra* (1982), *Kehinde* (1994), etc. carry this theme and emphasize the need for reforming women's position in Nigerian society. In her novels, Emecheta depicts African women who are marginalized by various forms of oppression preventing them to attain self-realization. Thus, it documents the fact that through her novels, Emecheta is going to give a self-understanding to African women. In other words, she attempts to reform the quality of African women's lives.

Emecheta's works therefore, start a turning point in Nigerian literature. She tries to speak for Igbo women and calls for "political consciousness of all women, couples with questioning and challenging the marginalization of women in all social systems" (Parekh & Jagne, 1988, p. 150). However, with political independence and social changes, women's position began to be changed. For instance, as Lafraniere (2009) suggests, "now women occupy a significant number of powerful ministerial positions in South Africa and other countries on this continent. In South Africa and elsewhere in Africa, women's rights are protected by constitution. Swaziland's new constitution, adapted in 2006, makes women the legal equals of men who are able to own property, signs contracts and obtain loans without the sponsorship of a man[...]" (p. 11).

### Conclusions

*The Joys of Motherhood*, an extraordinary novel which unfolds the story of invisibility and marginalization of African women who have no voice, aims at reconstructing part of history which is dismissed. Buchi Emecheta, in her novel, manages to disclose women's marginalization and oppression by both colonial and indigenous patriarchal regimes. Colonialism is obscurely demonstrated in *The Joys of Motherhood*. In the novel, native populations are obliged to make themselves compatible with those ideas and systems foreign to their own. Different factors such as foreign idealistic standards for education and conduct, Christianity, etc. endanger traditional culture.

All levels of society including Nigerian families and individuals are severely affected by European idealistic standards. Nnu Ego has to search for a novel structure of joy while traditional culture attempts to continue in a world of Logos. Her Ego clearly stands for traditional thinking of her society. "Of course, this inclination to search for definite and find answers does not belong to mentality from the time humanity came into this world" (Mahmoudi et al., 2014: 635).

Emecheta, indeed, echoes how women are subject to double oppression by the intersection of oppressive forces of *race*, *gender* and *class*. Moreover, she is going to highlight female sexual oppression, gender inequality and gender difference in Igbo patriarchy. She attempts to speak for the disempowered African women who have no voice of their own. Besides some writers such as Miriam Tlati and Ama Ata Aidoo, Emecheta, indeed, transcends the traditional way of representing black women.

Criticizing the patriarchal discourse in terms of her own creative discourse, she demands for change in order to improve African women's lives. It is in this context that Nyanhongo notes "some critics suggest that Emecheta's depiction of Nnaife and other similar men is problematic" (Nyanhongo, 2011, p. 89). In this case, Rodwell Makombe (2011) suggests that Emecheta "[m]akes no attempt to situate the disintegration of the African family within the colonial/postcolonial milieu, opting; however, to put all the blame on patriarchy" (p. 89). Yet, Emecheta, in her essay, calls herself a feminist with a small 'f', for, like Mohanty, she believes that Feminism is a "white, Western, middleclass ideology that doesn't take African women's particular situation and needs into account" (Nyanhongo, 2011, p. 62).

Overall, Emecheta, in her novel, *The Joys of Motherhood*, attempts to explore the extent to which the colonialism, racism and patriarchal society dominated Third World women and their lives. She, indeed, discloses the fact that it is possible to struggle for Third World women's rights and gender inequality within the patriarchal society while discussing for decolonization and anti-racist struggle.

This is the specificity which makes *The Joy of Motherhood* as an extraordinary novel. While black feminists and postcolonial feminist write against the intersection of oppressive forces of race, gender and / or class and Western feminists have singular focus on gender as a basis for sexual right, the *Joys of Motherhood* focuses on both premises. According to Palmer (1972), *The Joys of Motherhood* is "the first work in African literature to present the female point of view in registering its disgust at male chauvinism and patriarchy's satisfaction with an oppressive system toward women" (qtd. in Parekh & Jagne, 1988, p. 156).

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